Transcript: Grounds for Learning - Sand

Narrator: We know from trips to the beach just how much children love playing with sand. They can build large structures, engineer water courses or create more intimate landscapes suitable for imaginative or small world play.

Marion Brown, Playground Supervisor: They actually use their own imagination, they are actually really good at just finding things to do themselves, they all join in, they all play whatever they’re doing, if somebody starts doing something like making a pirate ship, they all want to help, they all want to do it so they keep themselves motivated basically so we’re just here supervising, making sure that nothing happens, there’s nobody getting left out because everybody is playing, especially the sandpit because everybody likes the sandpit, they like to play so it’s been a great thing for them.

Narrator: There’s a long tradition of providing sand play for children in the early years but recently primary schools have started to recognise the valuable experiences that sand can offer their children, for example maths concepts are supported through experimenting with volume, mass and flow, engineering abilities are developed as children construct and excavate, motor skills are enhanced by digging, constructing, carrying and jumping and creativity is supported as children construct imaginary worlds.

A common feature of sand play is the way that it promotes co-operation as children work together on their play projects.

Anne Daniels, Playground Supervisor: They enjoy themselves, they’re happy up here, they co-operate well with each other, they work together, P7’s and P1’s, you know, enjoy, any age range of primary school, they just, there never seems to be a lot of fighting or arguing or bullying or anything like that, it’s all very positive.

Narrator: Schools that have provided sand play have been surprised at how straight forward the experience has been but there are a few important management issues to consider; cat and fox poo is perhaps the most common concern.

Elaine Jukes, Acting Headteacher, Rosevale School: We now have a friendly neighbourhood fox who appreciates the sandpit almost as much as the children, so obviously from a risk assessment point of view and a hygiene point of view we have to be careful with the monitoring the sandpit, it’s checked every morning and it’s raked every morning.

Narrator: The other common issues for schools is how to avoid sand ending up in clothes and classrooms.

Louise Duncan, Headteacher, Banton Primary School: We ask parents, you know, do you want your children to get changed into some outdoor clothes and if they did the parents provided that, but we gave parents the option, we didn’t want them to think, well I’m going to have to buy x, y and z, it’s going to cost me a great deal of money. So we asked their opinion and we got lists back so we’ve got children we know who can use the sandpit, for instance, in their school uniform and those who will get changed.  But to be honest with you, it’s not that big a deal and the sand comes off really well, we use little dustpan and brushes to brush them down at the end, the children have got a process for trying to get as much sand off as possible and that’s part of the training for tidying up.

Narrator: Whilst large custom-built sandpits are a wonderful resource, temporary sandpits are easy to create using tarpaulins filled with sand and surrounded by sleepers or tyres. The same kind of structures can also be used for water play. You’ll find more detailed advice on managing sand in schools in the study notes that accompany this clip.